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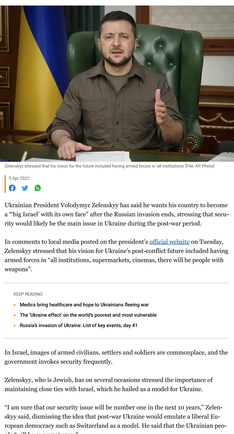
Zelenskyy says wants Ukraine to become a 'big Israel'

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy says the main issue for Ukraine after Russia's invasion ends will be security.



Zelenskyy stressed that his vision for the future included having armed forces in 'all institutions' [File: AP Photo]

5 Apr 2022

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has said he wants his country to become a "big Israel' with its own face" after the Russian invasion ends, stressing that security now would likely be the main issue in Ukraine during the post-war period.

In comments to local media posted on the president's official website on Tuesday, Zelenskyy stressed that his vision for Ukraine's post-conflict future included having armed forces in "all institutions, supermarkets, cinemas, there will be people with weapons".

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In Israel, images of armed civilians, settlers and soldiers are commonplace, and the government invokes security frequently.

Zelenskyy, who is Jewish, has on several occasions stressed the importance of maintaining close ties with Israel, which he hailed as a model for Ukraine.

"I am sure that our security issue will be number one in the next 10 years," Zelenskyy said, dismissing the idea that post-war Ukraine would emulate a liberal European democracy such as Switzerland as a model. He said that the Ukrainian people "will be our great army".

Zelenskyy also said that Ukraine would not be "absolutely liberal, European"; that it would have to undertake a different modus operandi.

"Ukraine will be definitely not be what we wanted it to be from the beginning. It is impossible," he told members of the Ukrainian media during a briefing.

"Absolutely liberal, European – it will not be like that. It [Ukraine] will definitely come from the strength of every house, every building, every person."

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Zelenskyy stressed that Ukraine would not slide into authoritarianism. "An authoritarian state would lose to Russia. People know what they are fighting for," he said.

Despite his ties with Israel, Zelenskyy has, however, been critical of the government's awkward position on the Russian war on his country. After maintaining a relatively quiet position on the invasion, Israel's prime minister came out with a statement condemning the alleged atrocities in Bucha, near Kyiv.

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Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett told reporters on Tuesday that he was shocked by the gruesome images emerging from Bucha, but he stopped short of accusing Russian forces of carrying out alleged war crimes or holding Moscow accountable.

"We are, of course, shocked by the harsh scenes in Bucha. Terrible images, and we strongly condemn them," he said. "The suffering of the citizens of Ukraine is huge, and we are doing everything we can to help."

Israel has emerged as a mediator in efforts to end the war, given its good relations with both Ukraine and Russia. In an effort to preserve his relationship with Vladimir Putin, Bennett has been measured in his criticism of the Russian president. Instead, Foreign Minister Yair Lapid has been vocal in his more harsh condemnation of Russia's actions in Ukraine.

Bennett referred reporters to the comments made by Lapid, who labelled the civilian deaths in Bucha a war crime.

"The images and testimony from Ukraine are horrific, Russian forces committed war crimes against a defenceless civilian population. I strongly condemn these war crimes," Lapid said in a statement.

SOURCE: AL JAZEERA AND NEWS AGENCIES

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